

Zevon hits bull's eye

By **LYNNE MARGOLIS**
Daily Collegian Staff Writer
"Excitable Boy," Warren Zevon
Electra-Asylum Records 6E-118

Warren Zevon has been a sideman for Jackson Browne and Linda Ronstadt for some time now. He composed two of the songs on Ronstadt's last album, including her hit, "Poor, Poor, Pitiful Me."

Now it's Zevon's turn in the limelight. "Excitable Boy," his third album, has caught the attention of rock critics, DJ's and record buyers all over the country. But why? What's so exciting about "Excitable Boy?"

Listening critically, one might think that Zevon's simple melody lines and guns 'n gore lyrics couldn't corner all this attention by themselves.

The songs don't differ too much from one another, his voice doesn't hold any surprises and his lyrics certainly do not dwell on the metaphysics of the universe. Yet there's something broadly appealing about these nine cuts.

And with a little help from the gang, including Browne, Ronstadt and most of her band, Mick Fleetwood, John McVie, and that unbeatable trio of ace sessionmen, Russ Kunkel, Leland Sklar and Danny Kortchmar, these simple songs turn into some catchy tunes. Which equals commercial appeal.

No less than three of Zevon's songs are currently riding the airwaves. "Werewolves of London" is already a hit, and "Johnny Strikes Up the Band" and "Accidentally Like a Martyr" are well on their way up the charts. The title song isn't doing badly either.

album review

That is not to say, however, the album's success is due only to Browne and Waddy Wachtel's slick production or to an abundance of familiar names in the credits. Zevon's songs are catching on because they're... well, they're catchy.

What he offers is good, simple rock and roll. And Lord knows, we could sure use more of that. Enough with the other garbage already (Are you listening, O Great Music Industry?)

"Johnny Strikes Up the Band" is a perfect example. The lyrics don't do much besides rhyme — nothing brain-taxing here. The beat is pretty standard for a rocker, with strong lead and bass guitar riffs. Not fiery, but pleasing.

"Werewolves of London," the song which gained notoriety for Zevon, is much more intriguing lyrically. After a few listens, it's still hard to tell whether those werewolves are just "rappers" or rapists. A lot of would-be studs seem to identify strongly with the first interpretation. Sources say they were last seen drinking English Bulls at the Saloon. Aaooooowuuuu. (Watch out, State College ladies, they're stalking you!)



Then again, Zevon does make references to mutilation and drawing blood. Hmmm, maybe he saw "Looking for Mr. Goodbar." Whatever. One can ignore the words totally and still appreciate this song. There's some excellent riffs by Wachtel on a variety of guitars. Zevon's piano is the grabber though. Good funk, overall.

"Accidentally Like a Martyr" goes lighter on the metaphors and deals with a subject anyone can identify with. After all, who hasn't felt the pain of losing a lover at least once in his or her life? "Should have done, should have done, we all sigh." Yep, "the hurt gets worse, and the heart gets harder." The man means what he sings this time around. Backup vocals by Carla Bonoff and "The Gentlemen Boys" round the tune into hit material.

But the two best numbers on the album, according to this writer, are "Excitable Boy" and "Nighttime in the Switching Yard."

The latter is a capsule observation of sounds as "the midnight train runs both ways." The beat is funky — there's no other word for it — and it grabs you immediately. Listen for the dual lead guitars and some outstanding bass rhythms, as well as Zevon's synthesizer mixes. "Nighttime" is another song

without complex arrangements or harmonies, but it's still undeniably good. And slick, slick, slick. The LP's superb production and engineering reaches a peak on this too-short song.

The LP's title song is more than just a nice, upbeat bopper-rocker. It's bizarre. Zevon has a more than passing fascination with violence. It's represented in his songs through the actions of several deranged characters. "Well, he went down to dinner in his Sunday best; Excitable boy, they all said. And he rubbed the potroast all over his chest... Well, he's just an excitable boy."

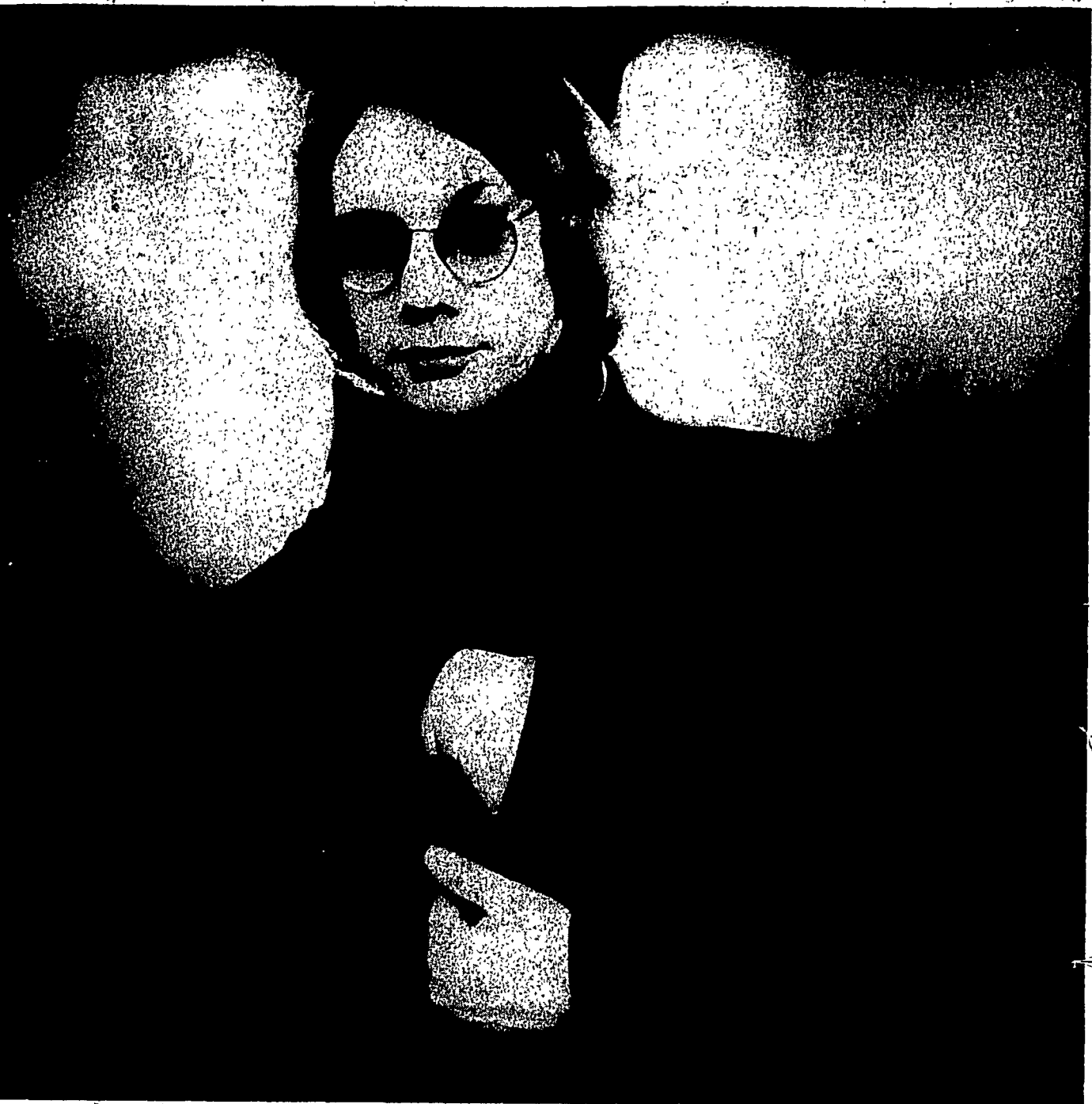
That may sound harmless, but it's only the first verse. It gets more "excitable" as the kid takes little Suzie to the Junior Prom, rapes and murders her, and then, 10 years later (after they let him out), he digs up her grave and makes a cage from her bones. But of course, "He's just an excitable boy."

Which is definitely a satirical bullet fired straight at our ailing society. But Zevon's insinuations don't bite sharply, they just nip playfully at your conscience. That's what makes them even more tantalizing — you have to listen carefully to catch them, then think a little to figure them out. But again, you don't have to bother with the words in order to get into the music.

If one pieces these songs together, though, they sound like the plot of some convoluted murder mystery. The cast would be Zevon's strange array of lovers and killers, of midnight men in trainyards and streetwise young ladies: "Daddy, don't you ask her when she's coming in; And when she's home don't ask her where she's been. She'll be okay; let her have her day. She'll find true love and tenderness on the block." There's even international intrigue here and there.

We may not know the plot, but we'd have no doubts about the murder weapon. Zevon must adore Dirty Harry, because he sure seems to idolize guns. The album's inner sleeve is a portrait of "Willy on the Plate" — a .38 caliber "Police Special" resting on a dish of cooked vegetables against a blood-red background. It does look rather appetizing.

Warren Zevon has finally found his mark with this album. Will he hit the bullseye again? As long as he keeps "Willy's" targets on rock and roll, let's hope he shoots right through it.



Warren Zevon

Butterflies & bunnies on screen

Downtown
"FM" — Enjoyable comedy about life in a Los Angeles radio station, featuring Michael Brandon and "Fernwood 2-Night's" Martin Mull. See today's review. Cinema Two

"The Betsy" — Movie version of the Harold Robbins potboiler concerning cars, sex, tycoons, sex, money and sex. For some reason, Laurence Olivier stars. The Movies

"Rabbit Test" — Unimpressive comedy, directed by Joan Rivers, about a pregnant man. Ho-hum. Cinema One

"Saturday Night Fever" — John Travolta, Karen Gorney, Bee Gees music and lots of fast disco dancing. But you know that already. The Flick

"House Calls" — Walter Matthau and Glenda Jackson are the romantic pair in this comedy directed by Howard Zieff. The cast also features Art Carney and Richard Benjamin. The Garden

"Semi-Tough" — Burt Reynolds and Kris Kristofferson work hard for the laughs but just don't seem to get any. They're the stars of this film based on Dan Jenkins' football novel. The State

"Butterflies" — Touted as Harry Reems' last film before he gave up his porno career. Has anyone noticed he is gone? Screening Room

MOVIES

"The Rocky Horror Picture Show" — The far-fetched storyline has managed to capture quite a following by now. Friday and Saturday midnight, The Movies

"On Campus" — It's getting close to finals again, so the number of on-campus films has dropped.

"Thunderball" — Probably one of the biggest James Bond films ever made, and winner of the 1965 Oscar for special effects. Sean Connery is at his macho best. Watch for the climactic underwater battle between the orange-suited good guys and the black-suited bad guys. Pölock Rec Room

"King Kong" — The 1976 remake of the 1933 classic monster movie. It's obvious they spent a lot of money for this one, mostly on the ape. Jeff Bridges and Charles Grodin play the parts previously done by Bruce Cabot and Robert Armstrong, with no-name Jessica Lange, making a vain attempt at the Fay Wray part. Kong plays Kong. Friday and Saturday, 111 Forum

"Silent Running" — Underrated science fiction film directed by Douglas Trumbull, who did the special effects for "Close Encounters." Bruce Dern is outstanding in the lead role as the curator of the last remaining garden outpost. Friday only, 102 Forum

—by John Ward

Jockeys provide laughs in movie about progressive rock station

By **JOHN WARD**
Daily Collegian Staff Writer
"FM" definitely qualifies as one of the shortest movie titles on record. That is, next to the political thriller "Z" and Fritz Lang's psychological "M." It's also one of several recent films to cash in on the music craze.

While "FM" is not a musical like the upcoming film versions of "Grease," "Hair" and "The Wiz," music is its dominant feature. The film deals with life in a progressive Los Angeles radio station and is more or less a comedy.

"More or less" because the basic dialogue and action in the radio station are played for laughs. But the film becomes muddled with unnecessary idealism.

Michael Brandon heads a cast of little-known but impressive stars. Brandon plays Jeff Dugan, the station manager of QSKY-FM and probably the least quirky of the disc jockeys.

movie review

Brandon builds Dugan as a very likable guy who gets along with everyone and want nothing more than the freedom to play what he wants on the air. As a matter of fact, it's impossible to find anything wrong with him. When the guy does something shady, like pirating a live concert out from under the nose of a rival station, he does so with an engaging smile that makes you think everything's OK.

The quirky DJ's are much more fun to watch. For instance, Cleavon Little plays a staff member known only as "the Prince of Darkness," and Alex Karras plays "Doc Holiday," a fumbling DJ who gets the boot when he can't cope with his job.



Eileen Brennan is good as "Mother," a female jock who is frequently disillusioned by the number of propositions and crank phone calls she gets.

But it is Martin Mull who steals the film as Eric Swan, the most egotistical member of Brandon's staff. Mull's character owes a lot to "The Mary Tyler Moore Show's" Ted Knight, but I daresay he pulls off a better job than Knight ever could. He's hilarious.

Mull can't seem to get through a single radio show without at least one groupie around to provide some company. When his girl walks out on him, Mull barricades himself in the studio and beseeches the entire female population of Los Angeles to come to his aid.

Quirks aside, this bunch really enjoys its work. That's the bond that ties them together when the profit-minded brass in Chicago begin lobbying for more commercial time.

They send a really square guy named

Regis Lamar to "sell" Brandon and Co. The conflicting styles of Lamar and the jocks provide some of the funniest moments. For instance, when invited to a Jimmy Buffett concert, Lamar responds that the loves a smorgasbord.

But Brandon will not be persuaded. When he is axed for his stubbornness, the jockeys come to his aid by locking themselves in the station.

This is when "FM" loses its direction. The film's ending is too contrived to be believable when set beside the basic goodness of the DJs.

How can we go along with the jockeys' fight against commercialism when we're saddled with an ending that reeks of that same commercialism? If that doesn't make any sense, see the film and you'll see what I mean.

Because the film is worth seeing. The lines between the good guys and the bad guys are clearly drawn, and the audience should have fun rooting for the disc jockeys of QSKY-FM.

Classical listings

Monday-Friday, 2 to 6 p.m., Saturday and Sunday, 1 to 6 p.m. (WDFM, 91 FM) "Arts Showcase."

Today, 2:05 to 4 p.m. (WDFM) The Philadelphia Orchestra; Eugene Ormandy cond., Lazar Berman piano. R. Strauss: Don Juan, Op. 20; Liszt: Piano Concerto No. 1 in E flat Major; Brahms: Piano Concerto No. 1 in d minor, Op. 15.

Sunday, 6 a.m. to noon (WXLR, 103.1 FM) "The Living Classics."

Sunday, 8 to 9 p.m. (WPSX-TV, Ch. 3)

"Previn and the Pittsburgh"; Dame Janet Baker sings a song cycle composed by Andre Previn after poems of Philip Larkin. Previn is the piano accompanist.

Monday, 2:05 to 4 p.m. (WDFM) The Chicago Symphony Orchestra; Margaret Hillis cond., Werner Klemperer narrator, Chicago Symphony Chorus. Handel: "Dixit Dominus"; Roberto Gerhard: Cantata, "The Plague" (1964).

—by Sam Levy

Olivier stoops to pulp movie 'Betsy' — the real life of the rich?

By **RON WAYNE**
Daily Collegian Staff Writer
From F. Scott Fitzgerald to Harold Robbins, the antics of the rich and powerful have been exploited by various authors but Robbins' "The Betsy" is especially appalling.

What is unfortunate is that a large market exists for these kinds of stories. But where Fitzgerald and the sophisticated film comedies of the '30s are entertaining, this film is not.

"The Betsy" is a poorly-acted and badly-written film that caters to an innate belief that the rich are lacking in character and generally unhappy.

The film shows how the rich lack any amount of moral fortitude as various characters display infidelity, homosexuality, incest and general promiscuity.

Perhaps Robbins is saying the rich do indeed have very basic urges but they are corrupted and deviated by money and power.

Laurence Olivier stars as the aging scion of an automobile family pattered so closely to the Fords, I'm surprised they haven't sued for slander.

The story begins with Olivier watching television with his great-granddaughter at his side and progresses through in-

termittent use of flashbacks to show the various closet skeletons the family has accumulated in four generations.

The old man wants to design a new car that would meet the demands of a 1975 public trust reflecting the initiative he used when he began the company (ala Henry Ford).

But his grandson tries to block what he considers the eccentric desire of an old man. Later, however, it is learned the grandson is just being vengeful for a past injustice committed by Olivier.

movie review

And between these instances, a soapy tale, spiced with a lot of sex, unravels.

We see the old man's son prove to be an inept leader after his father gives him part of the company and names a new model after him (ie. Edsel Ford).

Later the son shoots himself since he is not only inept but a homosexual. This suicide, of course, happens as the man's 6-year-old son watches, while his grandfather is upstairs humping his mother.

The rich are different, but I think things are a little too much in this film.

And what is surprising and a disservice to all who have admired him for years is that Olivier would allow himself to be featured in this piece of pulp.

Olivier does somehow manage at times to rise above the material. Others seem to try their best too, but at least one doesn't succeed.

Tommy Lee Jones in the hero role (yes, there is one of those too) is so monotonous in his emotions, I still cannot figure out what his character was all about.

Jones plays Mario, a race car driver who also has a background in engineering. His talent as well as being the grandson of an old Mafia friend of Olivier make him the "likely" candidate to execute the old man's plans.

In a pivotal role, Jones gives only the slightest hint of his character changing from a complacent playboy to an ambitious industrial leader.

He walks through most of his scenes, but is adequate in the sensual (and well-handled) sex scenes which is probably all that counts in this film.

If you do give in to your temptations and see the film, notice the type of cars driven by the family. Somehow, they look like Fords with odd grills. I wonder why.

Moody Blues reunite to cut album

The Moody Blues, recently reunited, have completed a new album with producer Bill Szymczyk. It will be their first with new bassist Tim Schmidt.

Jefferson Starship, on tour following the release of their latest LP, "Earth," will hit Philadelphia's Spectrum May 22 and Pittsburgh's Civic Arena May 23. Meanwhile, the current issue of "Rolling Stone" reports that despite the success of "Earth," the Starship is suffering from personnel problems, primarily from their two lead singers, Marty Balin and Grace Slick.

The Eagles are in Miami working on their new album with producer Bill Szymczyk. It will be their first with new bassist Tim Schmidt.

Former Doors members Ray Manzarek, Robbie Krieger, and John Densmore are in the studio with producer John Haeny, preparing the release of a new LP on Elektra-Asylum records, which will feature Jim Morrison's prose and poetry, new music and previously unreleased live material. Nearly seven years have passed since the death of Morrison who, before he departed for Paris in 1971, had begun an album he hoped to complete on his return to the United States.

—by Tom Butch

